

1.31.07 - Rahall Applauds Increases In Veterans Health Care, Education and Law Enforcement

WASHINGTON, DC - U.S. Rep. Nick J. Rahall (D-WV) applauded the passage of a joint funding resolution Wednesday that will keep the government operating through the end of the fiscal year while providing a boost for veterans' health care, education, and law enforcement.

"As Senator Byrd, who helped craft this legislation, said so well, there is no good way out of the fiscal chaos left behind by the outgoing Congress," Rahall said. "But we must clean the deck if we hope to successfully move our country in a new direction. I am pleased that this funding bill looks out for our veterans, for our children, and properly funds the transportation projects underway that are so essential to the future of West Virginia."

Under the joint funding resolution, the Department of Veterans Affairs will receive \$32.3 billion, an increase of \$3.6 billion above the 2006 funding level, to provide services for an anticipated increase of at least 325,000 patients and to meet rising health care costs. The Department of Defense will receive \$21.2 billion, an increase of \$1.2 billion, to provide care for service members and their families, including treating service members wounded in action in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"This funding increase will provide \$278 million dollars more a month for the VA system," Rahall said. "This increase is essential if we want to avoid harmful cuts in health care services and the sooner we pass this legislation and send it to the President the better it will be for our brave servicemen and women."

In addition, The Department of Education will receive \$13.6 billion, an increase of \$615.4 million, to increase the maximum Pell grant by \$260 to \$4,310. This increase-the first in four years-will help more than 5.3 million students pay rising college expenses, including a number of West Virginians. Funding for special education, Title I programs and Head Start will also receive funding increases under the new bill.

"More than ever, the health of our economy rests on having a highly-skilled and well-educated workforce," Rahall said. "College access is the key to our remaining strong in the face of an increasingly competitive global economy. The doors to our centers for learning should be open and affordable to all who wish to continue their education. This funding, combined with the legislation we passed during the first 100 hours to reduce the rates on student loans will help to begin to ease the burden on our leaders of tomorrow."

In the area of law enforcement, \$520 million will be provided to the Byrne Justice Assistance Formula Grants program, an increase of \$109 million. The Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) program will receive \$542 million, an increase of \$70 million. Together, these increases are the first step in reversing the drastic cuts to state and local law enforcement agencies made since the Bush Administration. Rahall has been a vocal supporter of both programs.

"As I have said time and time again, homeland security begins with hometown security," Rahall said. "These programs are vital to our communities and to the brave men and women who keep our streets safe and I am overjoyed to see them

finally get the fiscal attention they deserve."

Finally, the Joint Funding Resolution provides for the full funding of highway, transit, and highway safety programs in FY 2007 as authorized by the landmark 2005 highway bill which Rahall helped engineer.

Last month, Rahall joined his colleagues on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee in requesting that the funds be authorized.

"I am pleased that the Continuing Resolution honored the highway and transit funding guarantees, as requested by the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee in our January 17th letter to the Appropriations Committee," Rahall said. "The Department of Transportation estimates that 47,500 new jobs are created for every \$1 billion spent on transportation nationally. Clearly, this is a good investment for our State."

The funding in the Joint Resolution reflects a \$4 billion increase in investment over the FY2006 enacted level.

"There is no question that this announcement is a win for West Virginia," Rahall said. "This funding will keep the wheels turning on the many transportation projects underway."

Rahall helped pass the final version of the much anticipated transportation bill through the U.S. House of Representatives in August 2005 after months and months of work in committee and conference. The bill, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (TEA LU), H.R. 3, passed the House by an overwhelming bipartisan vote of 412-8. Rahall helped secure an annual average of \$404 million in the bill specifically for West Virginia's transportation needs over the next five years, and secured more than \$183 million in local projects including \$72.5 million for the I-73/74 Corridor; \$20 million for the Beckley Intermodal Gateway; the \$3.6 million for the New River Parkway; \$11 million for Route 10 in Logan County; \$16.7 million for the Coalfields Expressway; \$4 million for the Beckley Z-Way; \$38 million for the King Coal Highway; and \$1.8 million for the Shawnee Parkway.